1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

PLATE VIII

323

Photo. R. S. Webb

a. Umbundu pots (before firing), baskets, and hoes

285
286

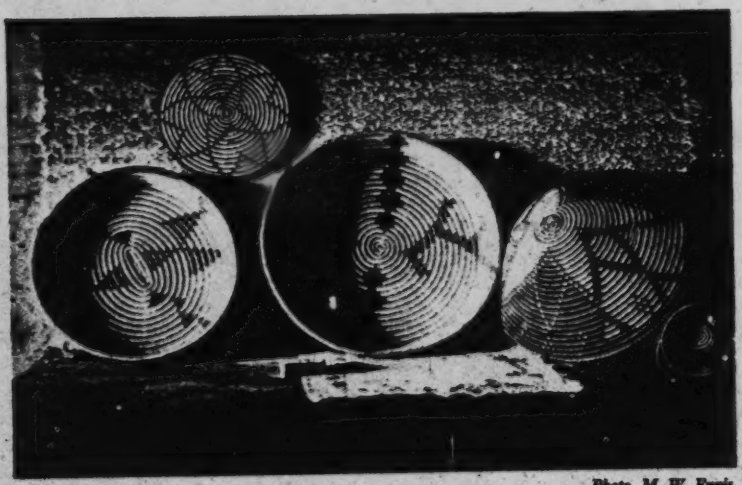


Photo. M. W. Ennis

b. Umbundu basketry with native-woven tapestry

[Facing p. 65]

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

heavy tasks and the close and constant routine of housework, on the other hand, sometimes require more than casual urging by the mother. Biographical evidence agrees with observation on this point, but nevertheless few girls reach puberty without attaining proficiency in the various household tasks. The decline of polygyny has probably hastened the girl's education in the household arts. When there is only one wife in the household, not only must she have more regular help from her daughters, but also it is more likely that the daughters will have to take on full responsibility at those times when the mother is unable for ritual reasons to take part in the preparation of her husband's food.[1] Biographical sources indicate that this tendency was already operating at least fifty or sixty years ago.

Every Ocimbundu assumes that his sustenance will come from cultivation of the soil. The 'professions' which a child may learn are therefore in the nature of side-lines. Although the Ovimbundu are not a true cattle-rearing people, they possess many domestic animals, especially dogs, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. Chickens are owned and looked after by both men and women, but the other animals only by the men. Boys may have small stock of their own, and a boy's economic independence most frequently begins with owning a chicken. Herding has been a function of the sister's son and even now there is reluctance on the part of boys to herd for their fathers. Animal husbandry is largely a commercial enterprise, save in the extreme southern tribes of Kalukembe, Ngalangi, &c.

The principal side-line 'professions' (*ovipinduko*) may be listed as follows:

FOR GIRLS

Basket-making, which is practised by all to a limited extent, but excelled in by relatively few.

Pottery-making.

Medical-practice and Divination (for conditions, see *infra*).

FOR BOYS

Mat-making, which includes the making of four distinct types of mats each of which has its specialist; the making of trays and large baskets for granaries.

[1] i.e. at the times of her menstrual periods, after the birth of a child, &c.

Formerly it was believed that a smith owed his skill to the help of the spirit of a person whom he had killed, and wooden effigies of this person were kept by the smith.(1) 326 782

The principal products of a blacksmith's forge are axe-heads, hoe blades,(2) tools for mat-making, arrowheads, knives, and brass bracelets. Iron, which is fairly plentiful, was formerly smelted over charcoal fires.(3) Today smiths use scrap iron. 325 412

Pottery

Pot-making is a part of women's work among the Ovimbundu. A wheel is not used. Clay is mixed with a silicate, usually gravel, rolled out in long ropes, and the pot built by the coiling process.(4) Pots are ornamented when wet by making deep incisions with a piece of gourd; they are then sun-dried, and fired in a kiln of dry grass. Pots are used as water-containers, as cooking vessels and as vessels for storing corn and beans, and, when made in a very large size, for brewing beer.(5) 323 [462]

No ritual attaches to pot-making, except at the opening of a new clay-pit, when, in the presence of both men and women from the village, the medicine-man sacrifices a chicken over the open pit.(6) [782]

Weaving and Spinning

Looms have not been used among the Ovimbundu since they have been a people, although progenitors of the kingly families who came from the Bangala or Congo groups may have done weaving. Trade cloth has been known and used by the Ovimbundu for nearly 300 years.(7) Skins have been used in remote areas; Hambly when he mentions bark-cloth as being worn by the Ovimbundu is probably referring to the Ngangela. Spun cotton, however, is used for repairs, and there is a cotton plant in most gardens. Spinning is done always by men.(8) 286 439 [281] [287] [283] 462

Basketry

All girls learn to make baskets, although some become more proficient than others. Knowledge of basket-making implies also an understanding of dyeing, since coloured strands of grass are interwoven to make geometric patterns.(9) Baskets, and also basket-trays, are usually made by the coiling process.(10) 285 462 [386]

(1) Hambly, (2) 1934, pp.158-60. The ceremony was described from Njemgolo village in Elende.
(2) See Cushman, 1944, pp.140-1.
(3) For details of the blacksmith's forge and tools, see Hambly, op.cit., pp.160-1; Cushman, 1944, pp.139, 140, 145-6.
(4) See Hambly, op.cit. Plates XXXIII and XXXIV, and Childs, 1949, Plate VIII.
(5) Hambly, op.cit., p.168; Cushman, op.cit., pp.144-5.
(6) Hambly, op.cit., p.169.
(7) Childs, personal communication. See also Childs, 1949, p.171, note 1.
(8) See Hambly, p.177, and Cushman, 1944, p.136.
(9) Red, yellow, black, and brown dyes are used. For a description of the process, see Hambly, op.cit., pp.170-1.
(10) See Hambly, op.cit., p.171, and Cushman, op.cit., pp.141-2 for details of basket-making. Also for illustrations Hambly, op.cit. and Childs, 1949.

Mat-making

462 285 [412] The making of mats is a specialised craft for men. Generally elderly men are the mat-makers. Two tools are used, a borer and a needle, both products of the blacksmith's forge. Hambly(1) describes the making of reed sleeping mats, large mats used for partitions, and string bags. There are four distinct types of mats, each of which has its specialist.(2)

Leather-work

282 Leather pouches worn on a broad leather belt are part of the essential equipment of the hunter. The pouch is square, rectangular, or semi-cylindrical in shape, and may be decorated with cross-shaped patterns, or brass-headed nails used for decorative effect. Hide is also used for the seats of four-legged wooden stools. Hides are crudely dressed: they are soaked, the inner surface rubbed with ashes, the hair scraped away, and the hide pegged out.(3)

Wood-carving

323 [413] Wood-carving, which is men's work, includes the following specialisations: doors, windows and their frames; coffins; beds, tables and chairs; mortars, pestles, grinding-handles, and handles for various iron implements; stools, household utensils, carved images etc., drums and other musical instruments; canoes (dug-outs and coracles).(4) Illustrations are given by Hambly.(5)

TRADE

438 484 791 [482] Caravan trade is now confined to short journeys when corn, beans and beeswax are carried by men and women porters to the traders' stores. Formerly however it was an important feature of tribal life. Each caravan had its professional leader, and was accompanied by a diviner or medicine-man. Before a caravan started out, a ceremony was performed at which the principal performers were the village headman and the medicine-man. The head of the former headman was brought from its box, sewn in oxhide; blood from a sacrificed animal was sprinkled on the head, and invocation was made to the deceased by the village headman, asking for good fortune for the journey.(6)

438 436 Today the Ovimbundu exchange products among themselves both by barter and the use of Portuguese money,(7) but there are no large markets except in the towns.

[435] 438 The "trade-agreements" between the Ovimbundu kingdoms and between the Ovimbundu and other tribes have been mentioned above.(8) Accompanying these, regional industrial and commercial specialisations within Ovimbundu country developed. Thus in the middle of the last century

(1) Hambly, op.cit., pp.169-70.
(2) Childs, 1949, p.109.
(3) Hambly, op.cit., p.176.
(4) Childs, op.cit., p.110.
(5) Op.cit., Plates XIII to XXII.
(6) Hambly, op.cit., p.156.
(7) For details of Ovimbundu units of measurement see Hambly, op.cit., p.157.
(8) p.9.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

At the present time a day's march is twenty-five miles, during which a man carries sixty pounds, while the load for a woman is half that weight. The gait of the Ovimbundu includes a limp at every step, so suggesting that the carrier is lame or tired. This appears to be a method consciously adopted as a protection against fatigue, because all muscles are momentarily relaxed. Loads are carried on the head in a long forked stick to which they are lashed. When the carrier rests, the load is not placed on the ground, but is held upright on the stick (Plate XXX, Fig. 2). Such a method avoids the strain of lifting the load from the ground after each rest pause.

Although the Ovimbundu have an exchange of products among themselves by both barter and the use of Portuguese money, there are no large markets, with the exception of those at the coastal towns of Loanda, Lobito, and Benguela. There is absolutely nothing in Angola which can be compared with the great markets in Nigeria.

Despite the absence of a system of exchange on a large scale, the Ovimbundu have many terms describing units of measurement. There are native standards of length, area, and capacity, but no measures of weight which are undeniably of Umbundu origin.

The unit of length (*epaluma*) is the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the middle finger when the hand is outstretched. The term for two of these units is *apaluma avali*. These words are the plural of *epaluma; avali* means two. These units are used to measure tobacco before it has been coiled.

Cloth is measured by stretching the arms to their full extent in line with the shoulders; the distance between the tips of the middle fingers is *epeka*. The stride for measuring land is *elianga*.

Onjimba is an area about twenty-five feet square. *Etemo* ("hoe") is an area of land two hundred yards long and thirty feet broad. A large field covers two or three *atemo*.

Measures of capacity are provided by various types of baskets. The large conical basket (*ohumba*) has an interwoven mark which indicates a measure for corn, meal, and beans. *Ocitenge* is a coarsely made basket used as a unit of capacity. *Uhamba* is a basket two feet long and one foot deep. The basket on a rectangular base is also *uhamba*, but at the present day cans are taking the place of all these old measures. Palm oil is measured in a gourd (*ocitau* or *ombangi*) of definite size. This little gourd is also used for measuring a viscous substance from trees. The word *ekokoto* is used to describe this mucilage.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

When the clay was being mixed an old pot was broken and pulverized so that some of the powder might be added to the new pot. There may be the underlying idea of continuity in the potter's art. The potters said, *Sanga yi pita* ("Lest it leak"). There may be no purpose other than the imparting of stability to the new clay.

I was unable to find any trace of ritual except with reference to the opening of a new clay pit. When a pit is first opened both men and women attend. The head of a chicken is twisted off by a medicine-man, then the bird is held over the pit by either a man or a woman. There is no law or ceremony to determine who shall take the first clay from the pit. The art of making pots is in the hands of female specialists so far as the Ovimbundu are concerned. Observation makes clear that women will go for a long distance to obtain clay from the pit which has been opened in a ceremonial manner. On their way to such a pit they pass clay which would serve their purpose well, but they do not use it. Children sometimes amuse themselves by making animals of clay.

The pottery of the Ovimbundu includes cooking vessels of many sizes, water containers, and very large pots for brewing beer (*olombia vi okukela*).

MATS AND BASKETS

This occupation illustrates division of labor on a sex basis. Baskets are made by women, while mat-making is an occupation for males. As with other trades there is specialization. The majority of women are able to make baskets though the skill of individuals varies. All women who have a knowledge of basketry understand the manufacture of dyes. Only a few men make mats; my informant thought that perhaps one man in ten would have the necessary skill. Such specialization is continued into other occupations; for example, only a few men spin cotton thread, while the majority of people buy pottery from expert female potters.

The mat-maker, generally an elderly male, uses two tools, a borer and a needle, both products of the native forge. The borer (*utomo*) for piercing the reeds, consists of a long thin blade in a wooden grip. The needle (*osinja*) is threaded with bark fiber and passed through the holes made by the *utomo*. The bark thread is *ombanja* (plural *olombanja*).

The sleeping mat (*esisa*) is made of reeds which are gathered in the early morning by a man who wets and binds his material into bundles, each of which contains reeds of the same length. The length of the reeds varies, of course, with the size of mat he intends to make.

285 The name *esisa* is given to the raw material as well as to the mat. The worker begins by laying out the reeds on the ground, side by side; then the slender tool *utomo* is passed through the reeds near their ends. This position is made permanent by sewing, and the process is repeated at intervals along the length of the reeds (Plate XLII, Figs. 1, 2).

Evinda is a large mat, about 120 cm long and 20 cm wide, while each strip of coarse elephant grass is about 3 cm wide. Ability to make the rush mat (*esisa*) is fairly common, but skill in making *evinda* is less usual. The mat *evinda* has several uses; it may be stretched on the floor or bed as a sleeping mat, or possibly it is rolled so that the ends can be fastened together; so treated it forms a cylinder which may be filled with grain when stood upright on the ground. A number of these mats is sometimes used to form a temporary storage place or shelter. The technique is of the twilled variety in which each weft passes over and under two warps.

Ocala is a coarse mat made from long stalks which are called "elephant grass" by the Boers; the agricultural term is "Napier's fodder." The long rods are white and glazed, so forming an artistic contrast to the crossbinding, which is of black bark. The technique is known as check, a term used to describe a structure in which warp and weft pass over and under each other singly.

The large mat (*ocikanga*) which is of soft texture shows neatly woven, diamond-shaped patterns of dark brown grass. The technique of this mat is of the twilled variety in which each weft passes over and then under two warps.

283 String bags, which are used for suspending gourds or hanging them over the shoulder, are made by men only. The root *ombundi*, mentioned in connection with brewing beer, is used for making string bags. Two fibers that have been teased out from the root are rolled tightly together by rubbing them between the palm and the thigh.

[462] Strong rope is sometimes made by plaiting coarse grass; this occupation is in the hands of males.

386 In basket-making the preparation of dyes is of great importance
[531] because colored strands of grass are inwoven to make named geometrical patterns (Plates IX; X). The Umbundu expression for dyeing is *oku lisa olosovo.*

Red coloring is produced by taking leaves of a plant named *evava*
[515] and cooking them in water along with the bark of the tree *ukondo.* *Ukondo* is the "tooth brush" tree because small pieces of its wood are chewed and used for cleaning the teeth. After the grass has

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

simmered in this infusion of *evava* leaves and *ukondo* bark, it is buried in a heap of ashes and earth. These processes produce the red coloring. 386

Yellow dye is made from the roots of a wild rhubarb (*ocilunguluila*) which has sagittate leaves. The roots are pounded and mixed with cold water, after which the grass is placed in the mixture. A pot containing the mixture is put on the fire and the contents are boiled for half an hour; at the end of this time the grass is an amber-yellow in color.

In order to dye grass black the leaves of *evava*, the plant used for making red dye, are mixed with an iron solution obtained from the mud of stagnant pools. If the grass which has been cooked in this mixture is not sufficiently dark it is reboiled in the *evava*-iron mixture to which the pounded leaves of *ungalo* are added. Brown coloring is made by mixing the red dye with the yellow.

Baskets made by the coiling process are the most common type manufactured by Ovimbundu women (Plate XV, Fig. 6). The large basket *ohumba* is a woman's field basket in which she carries corn, sweet potatoes, and manioc, along with her hoe and pounder (Plate XXVIII, Fig. 2). Each coil consists of a large number of strands of fine grass which are tightly bound. The coils of the better baskets are wrapped with the grass called *osoka;* this wrapping fastens each coil to the preceding coil. Coarser baskets have the coils wrapped with strips from the leaf of the screw pine (*emañalālo*). There is a sewing process in which the coils are bound to one another with the bark *olondovi*, which is kept damp during the process. I have seen a needle, threaded with bast, used for sewing coils together; the needle was rethreaded every time it passed through a coil. Success in basket-making depends largely on the ability of the worker to keep the coils of uniform thickness. There is constant inspection and plucking out of a strand of grass here and there (Plate XXXIX, Fig. 2). 285

In making basket trays (*ongalo*), the same coiling process is followed, but the work is kept flat. These trays are used for winnowing corn. Wicker-work is used for making conical traps for small game such as hares and rats. Conical fish traps are made of wicker-work. Names of patterns, which are of a simple geometrical kind, are well known to basket-makers. Sometimes a pattern is woven round the basket at a certain height to indicate a generally accepted standard for measurement of capacity. [531]

285 171 Among the Ovimbundu are to be found baskets which they themselves seldom copy. These examples are from the Vachokue country of eastern Angola. The Vachokue specialize in making winnowing trays and rectangular baskets which are twilled by passing each weft over two or more warps.

By this technique, combined with the use of brown and black weft and warp, a great variety of geometrical patterns is produced. Trays of this kind vary in diameter from 50 to 200 cm. The Vachokue also make large strong trays in which honey is exposed to dry.

In the neighborhood of Cassanga wicker-work baskets are made. The warps or stakes are rigid while the more flexible wefts bend in and out. At this place there are both Ovimbundu and Vachokue inhabitants.

Women of the Vakuanyama in southern Angola make exceptionally neat little conical baskets by lashing coils very tightly. The lashing is done in such a way as to leave the outer surface covered with small chevron-shaped designs.

177 285 There is an intrusion of European influence which tends to mar the work of the Ovimbundu and other native craftswomen. Soft dyes produced by methods described are sometimes replaced by brightly colored, imported dyes; old ribbons from typewriters are soaked in order to extract coloring. The Ovimbundu are imitating European forms of basketry in a few centers, though the native method of coiling is still used.

WEAPONS

411 The bow of the Ovimbundu is made of hard red wood which takes a high polish after use. It is round in cross section and tapers considerably toward the ends. The length is usually 150 cm, not an inconvenient size in view of the fairly open bush through which the hunter has to make his way. The bowstring is made of a thin strip of twisted hide, which is looped over each end of the bow by a slip knot made of two half-hitches. A shoulder at each end of the bow shaft prevents the slip knot from passing down the shaft. In some examples only one end of the bow stave is notched. Usually, after completing the slip knot, the hunter leaves a surplus of bowstring which is wound round the shaft. One bow which is not notched has rattan wound round the stave to prevent the loops from slipping.

The bow for shooting bird arrows is small and is used only by boys; the string is of twisted vegetable fiber.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

The use of bird-arrows with blunt, wooden knobs was common at Elende, and I collected sharp, barbed, wooden arrows from the Vasele, also from the areas of Kipungo and Mongua. This will assist in extending the information given by Lindblom (pp. 94–98). Lindblom's map (p. 99) indicates that bird-arrows are used round Lake Victoria Nyanza, at the junction of the Kasai and the Congo, and likewise among the Bushongo and the Bayaka. My observation of the distribution of wooden arrows in Angola links up these regions shown by Lindblom with the south of Angola. Perhaps a trans-continental diffusion in a southwesterly direction from Victoria Nyanza may be assumed, for it is unlikely that the diffusion would go counter to the generally accepted line of tribal migration which has been from northeast to southwest.

AFRICAN POTTERY, BASKETS, AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

There is no reason to connect the pottery of the Ovimbundu with that of any particular region. The coiling method is far too widespread and generic to afford evidence of contacts. The Ovimbundu have evolved their own peculiar designs and forms.

In coiled basketry also the Ovimbundu have made special developments from a generic trait known in Egypt before 2000 B.C. Designs and dyes appear to be of local origin. My observation of African basketry does not suggest any particular parent form; moreover, resemblances of design may be misleading, for the nature of the material controls the shapes of the designs to a great extent in coiled basketry.

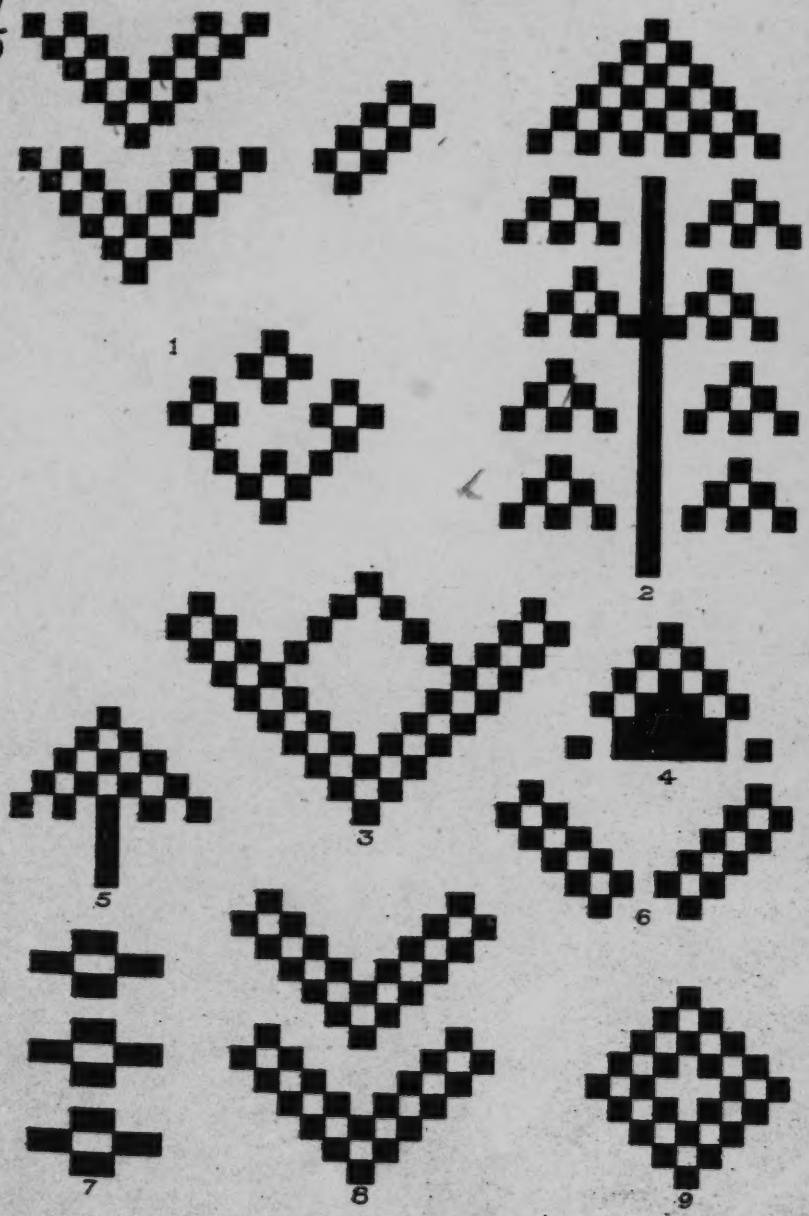
Wood-carving, on the contrary, links the culture of the Ovimbundu very definitely with that of the southwest Congo. Perhaps the work of Angola is most closely allied with that of the Bakuba, who excel in the carving of figurines, cups, and staffs.

H. Balfour's article (III) on the distribution of the friction drum helps to identify the form used by the Ovimbundu with types of this instrument from other African areas. The type from Elende is like that of Barotseland with which the Ovimbundu caravans were frequently in contact, while the large friction drum from Ngalangi is of the Bayaka pattern. The friction drum is widely used in the southwest Congo among the Bakwese, the Bambala, and the Baluba.

Thus far research has been able to show a large number of cultural traits of the Ovimbundu in relation to immediate culture contacts of the Congo basin, Rhodesia, and South West Africa (chapter X). In addition to this, many traits connected with social

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

531
285

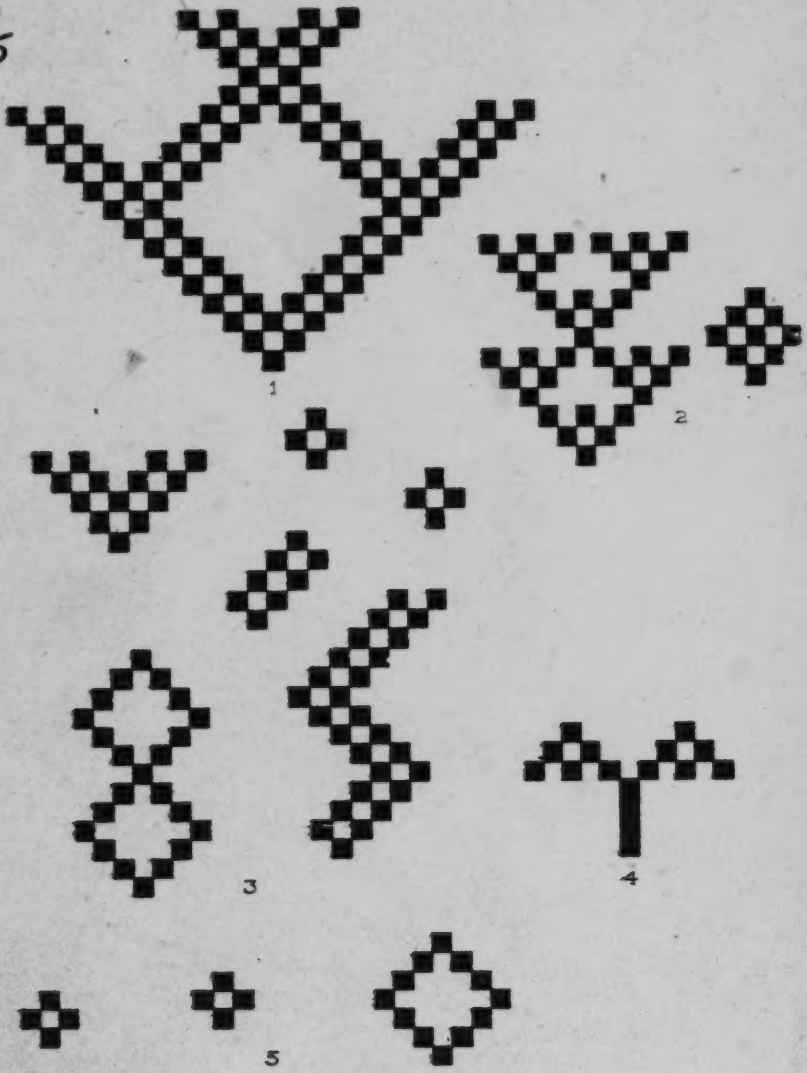


BASKET-WORK PATTERNS

[p. 363

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

531
285

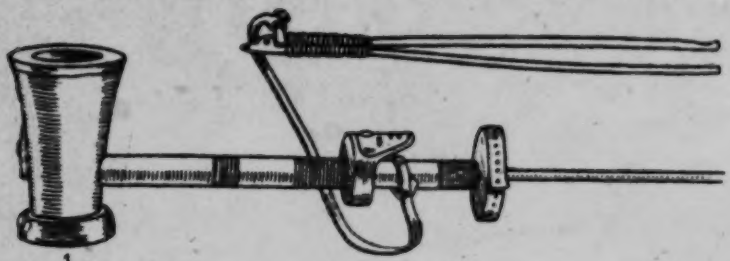


BASKET-WORK PATTERNS

[p. 364]

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

276



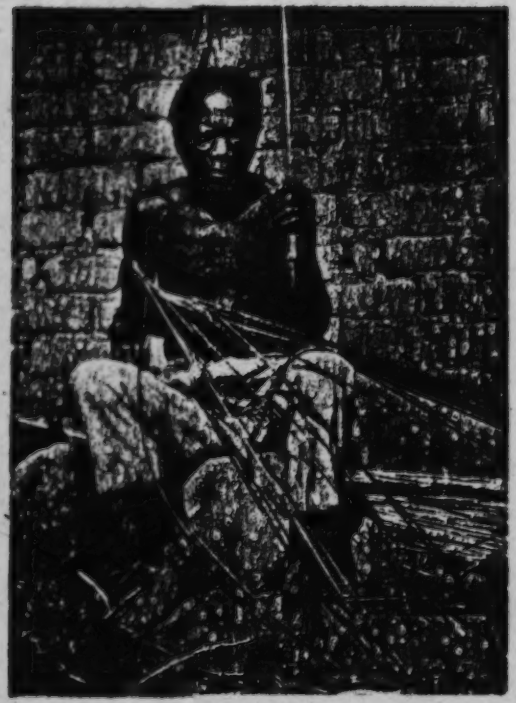
[285]

TOBACCO-PIPES, SNUFF BOX, RAT TRAP, AND BASKET

[p. 369]

Hambly E-5 (1929-1930)1934 FP3 Mbundu FP3

[p. 396]



1

2

OCIMBUNDU MAKING MATS, ELENDE

Fig. 1. Tool for mat-making. Fig. 2. Threading reeds on tool

285
343

[p. 420]

1

2

STORAGE OF MAIZE, VAKUANYAMA, SOUTH ANGOLA

Fig. 1. Grain basket. Fig. 2. Shelter for basket

3- Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

5: Hambly E-5 (1929-30)1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

sided permanently in the wooden figure. This ritual murder is now impossible, but the wooden figures are still used in the way described.

Women are never engaged in blacksmiths' work; neither are they employed as wood carvers. Among men wood carving is a specialized occupation, and within the craft itself are men who deal solely with one branch of the work. Thus in a village perhaps only one man is capable of making a drum, while another carves life-like wooden figures of animals, and a third specializes in the fabrication of household implements.

Among the Ovimbundu women are the only potters, but I found just one exception in the case of a man who said that he learned the potter's craft in eastern Angola among the Vachokue. No ritual is connected with the making of pottery, but I observed that women always frequented one pit for their clay and in doing so passed better clay which was more accessible. I learned that a clay pit has to be consecrated by a medicine-man who kills a chicken and sprinkles the blood in the pit. All women at some time learn the arts of pottery making and basketry, but by the process of selection the industries become concentrated in the hands of the most skillful.

Only women make baskets; a craft in which they are skilled, especially in the gathering of plants and the extraction of dyes of soft shades. Such dyes have considerable endurance even though exposed to bright sunlight. Imported dyes are now competing with indigenous products, but the latter are still preferred in most localities. One might expect that women who are skilled in basket making would be expert weavers of mats, but this is not so. Mat making is in the hands of men who are skilled specialists, and within the mat making industry are at least three principal divisions of the craft, one for each type of mat.

Men spin cotton for mending clothes, but I have not seen women so engaged. I did not see any looms in use in Angola, but they survived up to a few years ago, and in the youth of my interpreter, who was about thirty years of age, looms worked by men were plentiful.

House building shows a division of labor according to age and sex. Men are responsible for cutting the poles, digging the trench in which these uprights are set, and binding the cross-pieces with bark. Men are likewise responsible for plastering the walls and laying the thatch. Women carry water to the clay pit and transport the puddled clay to the men who are plastering the walls. Children, some of them so young that they have to be rescued from a swampy grave, delight in puddling the clay with their feet. The rectangular pit is always as near the house as possible in order to minimize the labor of transport. I suggested that some of the tasks should